



Urban planning thoughts in ancient China



Rites of Confucianism and urban planning thoughts

The use of Confucian rites to guide urban planning could be traced back to Kaogongji in Rites of Zhou, a book written in the late Spring and Autumn Period. The "State Management System" in Rites of Zhou had a profound influence on the urban planning, in particular capital planning in Chinese history. It put forward the ideal urban planning model, and sketched the basic contour of city planning in ancient China. Meanwhile, in the "State Management System", some ritual thoughts like "choosing the center to build", "holding the center as superior", etc are also reflected in urban planning in ancient Chinese city.



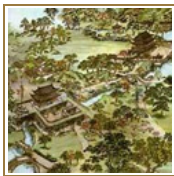
Unity of heaven and man and urban planning

Starting from the Zhou Dynasty, the ideology of unity of man and nature had been embodied in the urban planning of ancient China. For instance, Suzhou City built by Wuzi Wei of the Wu State, and Kuaiji City built by Fan Li of the Yue State during the Spring and Autumn period were the exemplary cases. The thirteen monumental archways in Chang'an, capital of the Tang Dynasty, were the symbol of the twelve months and the intercalary month; the four lanes to the south of the imperial palace symbolized the four seasons, with the east lane standing for spring, the south summer, west autumn, and north winter. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties.



Different connotations of number

The number itself is abstract and meaningless, but sometimes it is combined with some specific concepts. In ancient China, the number "3" represents unity of heaven, earth, and human beings; "5" stands for gold, wood, water, fire, earth, yin and yang, as well as the Five Elements; "9" symbolizes the heaven (Cloud Nine), implying dignity. These implications were applied to city planning, for instance, the city wall of Chang'an in the Han Dynasty had three gate holes, and in the Tang Dynasty, the Mingde Gate of Chang'an as well as Tian'anmen and Wumen Gates of Beijing had five gate holes. Chang'an in the Tang Dynasty had six streets, and Luoyang in the Han Dynasty had nine gates to open. The use of odd numbers is closely related to the central axis layout, and the central gate was usually used exclusively by the emperor.



Influenced by ancient myths

The landscape model of Chinese myths, typically a combination of holy mountain and the sea, is a living space with strong security and superb ecological environment. Usually the sea surrounds the mountain, and plants and architectures can be found in the mountain. The model has laid the foundation for the building of classical Chinese gardens in later generations, forming the landscape pattern of "one pond and three mountains". Apangong Palace, an unprecedented imperial palace built by Emperor Qin Shihuang, first established the garden style of "immortal artistic conception" in Chinese history. During the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, the architectures in the "Shanglin Parkland" followed the immortal artistic conception of "one land and three mountains". Quite a few landscapes, like the "Zhonghai, Nanhai, and Beihai" Lakes in Beijing, and the "Xuanwu Lake" in Nanjing, are the products born under the guidance of "one pond and three mountains".

The largest capital of ancient China - Chang'an of the Tang Dynasty

Chang'an City of the Tang Dynasty (named Daxing City in the Sui Dynasty) was the most magnificent capital in Chinese history. Initially built by Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty, the capital reflected the grandeur of a united dynasty. To express the wish of unifying the country and long term peace and stability, the building of Chang'an had included the conception of "Heaven-vouchsafed opportunities, terrestrial advantages, and support of people" during the planning process. Following the rules of heaven and earth, with the emperor respected in the center, while the officials attending on both sides. To accommodate larger population, the city of Chang'an was built unprecedentedly large in scale, with a size of 84 square kilometers, 2.4 times larger than that of Chang'an in the Han Dynasty, 1.4 times larger than that of Beijing in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. It was one of the biggest cities at that time, 7 times larger in size than the capital of Byzantine Empire of the same period, and 6.2 times larger than Bagdad built in 800 A.D. After the establishment of the Tang Dynasty, Chang'an underwent renovations several times.



The planning of Chang'an in the Tang Dynasty



Site selection and initial building

After a conscientious investigation, Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty selected south of Longshouyuan as the capital site, which was 20 li southeast to the Han-Dynasty Chang'an City. The south part of Longshouyuan was originally connected to the north of Han-Dynasty Chang'an City. Judging from the

topographical conditions, as the Qinling mountain range makes a turn from south to the northeast in Xi'an, the region turns out to have a landform of higher southeast and lower northwest. Constrained by the geographical condition, rivers having their sources in the Qinling Mountains like Bahe River, Chanhe River and Yuhe River cut through the southeast of today's Xi'an and flow northwest to Weishui River. These rivers divide the plain area of downtown Xi'an, forming several long strips from southeast to northwest.



Site selection and initial building

According to Records of Chang'an by Song Minqiu as quoted from Sanli Chart of Sui Dynasty, the number of lanes and streets in Daxing City were also designed on special purpose. The south to the imperial palace had four lanes, symbolizing four seasons; nine lanes in the south and north, referring to the ritual from

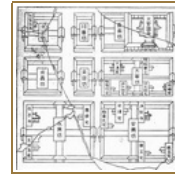
Rites of Zhou; the thirteen lanes at both sides of the imperial palace stood for the twelve months of a year plus a intercalary month. Whether it was the truth or not, it was the universal rule to add symbolic meanings to the planning of a city. Looking down from the air, one can see the layout of Xi'an is similar to liuyao (divinatory symbols) of the Qian Diagram as described in The Book of Changes.

Layout of Chang'an City in the Tang Dynasty



Commercial zone: east market and west market. It was a place where a dazzling array of commodities and numerous businessmen gathered. It was the economic activity center of

Chang'an City, and the industrial and commercial trade center of the country.



Residential area: Lifang (lanes). Lanes were separate residential units of Chang'an, similar to today's residential community. They were orderly arrayed and planned in

unification.



High-end dwelling houses: royal city. It was located close to the imperial palace at the south. Chengtianmen Street divided the royal city into east and west halves, and all the

buildings were distributed in symmetry with the street as the axis.

City designers little known to the public



Yuwen Kai

Planner of Chang'an City in the Sui Dynasty. Yuwen Kai was born in the late Northern Dynasty in a noble family known for its military achievements. He was a long-term official of the Sui Dynasty in charge of construction, supervising the building of many large scale architectures. Quite a few huge civil engineering projects built during the Sui Dynasty such as Daxing City, East Capital Luoyang, the Guangtong Canal, restored Old Luban Road, the Great Wall, etc were completed under the planning, design and leadership of Yuwen Kai.

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